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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000233

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SUBJECT: NLD IN THE PROVINCES: RARIN' TO GO

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Department's Burma Desk Officer joined Poloff and PolFSN on an early February three-day 500-mile road trip from Rangoon to Mon and Karen States, which lie on Burma's southeastern border with Thailand. NLD members we met in Mon and Karen States seemed fairly well organized and mentally in the game. Representatives remained in contact with national leaders, each other and local members, even with their offices shuttered. All seemed ready, and even eager, for continued pursuit of democracy as soon as they are given the opportunity to express their views freely and to organize openly. END SUMMARY.

MON STATE NLD: STILL IN THE WILDERNESS

12. (C) Moulmein NLD MP-elect and Mon State NLD Vice Chair Naing Thaung Nyo recounted that the NLD won 16 out of 20 seats in the state in 1990. Of those 16 MPs, five have resigned and one has gone into exile to join the NLD-LA. Their NLD offices were closed after May 30 and members are unable to move around freely due to tight security controls. Like the NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) in Rangoon, they are trying to mobilize in their own way and are using the home of the provincial Chairman as their party office. The Mon State NLD sent representatives to meet with the five free NLD CEC leaders a month after their release from house arrest. They remain in communication with their colleagues in Rangoon and follow their directives.

ANY KNU CEASE-FIRE IMPACT?

13. (C) The Vice Chairman stated that the SPDC-KNU cease-fire will have "no effect" on the NLD. There is no political gain for the SPDC because their goals in the cease-fire are too divergent from the KNU's. He then tempered his remarks, saying the participation of the KNU in a national convention might lead to pressure on the NLD to join.

14. (C) In the Vice Chairman's opinion, the SPDC is now unable to maneuver politically due to economic and social constraints, and is using the road map as the way to escape from this situation. Asked if the NLD in Mon State has discussed the PM's road map, the Vice Chairman replied, officially "there is no discussion of the road map within the Mon State NLD membership, the topic is not under consideration." He then offered that "the heart of the road map is undemocratic, so it can't work for the ethnics nor for the NLD." He defined this thought further by saying the road map would be acceptable and would be fine for a political transition, except for the part about the military taking the leadership role in Burmese politics.

NO NLD POLITICAL PRISONERS?

15. (C) No NLD members in Mon State were arrested after the May 30 Depeyin attack. Six local NLD youth arrested in 1997 were recently released, leaving about 40 other non-NLD political prisoners in the Moulmein prison. Each month, the Mon State NLD Humanitarian Assistance Committees visits them to provide food and clothing.

KAREN STATE NLD HOLDING STEADY

16. (C) Emboffs also visited Daw Nant Khin Htwe Myint, Vice Chairman of the Karen State NLD and MP-elect from Pa-an Township, capital of Karen State. She reported that there were 2,000 NLD members in Pa-an, and another 5,000 in the seven Townships around Karen State, with many more inactive or "sleeping" members. She stated that May 30 had not brought a change in the political, economic, or social situation in Karen State. Prior to May 30, freedoms had been thoroughly oppressed, and there hadn't been an open NLD office. Pa-an had been scheduled for a visit by ASSK to reopen the NLD office there. The MP-elect uses her house as the NLD gathering point in Pa-an. She has already met with the NLD CEC in Rangoon to discuss the road map and finds it and the National Convention unacceptable.

KNU CEASE-FIRE?: TOO EARLY TO TELL

17. (C) Regarding the impact of the KNU cease-fire, Daw Nant

Khin Htwe Myint said "it is too early to say." The KNU hadn't discussed the cease-fire with the NLD, but the Vice-Chair noted that the mentality and objectives of the KNU and NLD are the same, and pointed out that ASSK had always publicly supported ethnic group declarations or statements. The MP-elects's brother, Saw Soe Htut, is a KNU CEC member.

18. (C) Regarding political prisoners, in Karen State, there are no NLD members currently in detention. However, there are still 20 students in jail convicted under law 17(I) for alleged connection with illegal organizations -- particularly the KNU.

NLD LIFE IN A SMALL TOWN

19. (C) We visited a small NLD office in Thaton Township, halfway between Rangoon and Moulmein. Daw San Myint, the Vice Chair, told us that there were 19 NLD organizers and 3,000-4,000 NLD members in the township. However, the organization and recruiting were static for the time being. The last party meeting was held January 23 at her house, the regular office having been shuttered -- though the local NLD still pays the 9,000 kyat (\$10 USD) monthly rent for the office space. The local representatives of the military junta periodically visit her house to check on recent NLD activity.

REGIME SECURITY GOONS INTERFERE

10. (C) The security controls on the NLD were very evident during our visit, including the Office of the Chief of Military Intelligence (OCMI) visiting our hotel twice in Moulmein demanding the staff question us on our purpose for the visit. Our first attempt to visit the NLD Chairman in Moulmein was spoiled after OCMI learned of our presence in the city and subsequently placed security at the entrance of the Chairman's house. He was only able to meet with us by setting up an early morning meeting in a restaurant the next day. In Pa-an, the Vice-Chairman told us that OCMI would visit her house following our visit to question her on the reason we had come.

11. (C) COMMENT: Considering the post-May 30 pressure the NLD has been under, the NLD members appeared to be very upbeat and ready for the next opportunity to bring their fight into the open. The heavy presence of OCMI could be felt in Moulmein, but surprisingly, Pa'an felt a little less restricted. In the small town of Thaton, the only security pressure reportedly came from the chatty local Peace and Development Council Chairman, which could explain why Thaton NLD members can be so vocal in their desire for change. END COMMENT.
Martinez